

Oshawa Horticultural Society

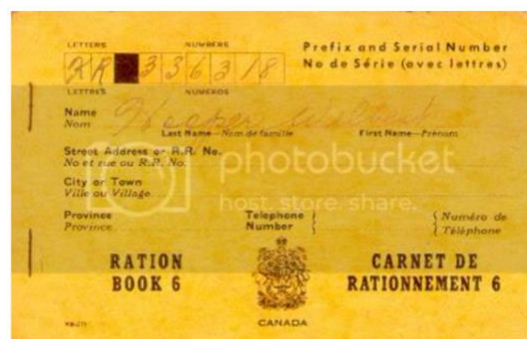


Issue #3 – Our Second Decade – The War Years and Beyond

We continue our journey that began with the rebirth of the **Oshawa Horticultural Society** on 23rd of **February 1931**. This journey is part of our 90th Anniversary celebrations.

Not unlike our current times, fate intervened in the plans of the fledgling OHS members to garner more interest in gardening and horticulture in general with Oshawa residents. It would be an understatement to say that the war effort took over the priorities of the general public. Many men and women boarded trains, to begin a journey across the Pacific to take a first-hand part in the conflict while others stayed behind to join the war efforts as part of the industrial push to supply our allies with needed equipment and supplies.

It would have been difficult in the early 40s to maintain higher levels of active membership in the Oshawa Horticultural Society and to continue activities as they were before the war. Still, horticulture played a very significant role in the support of our civilian population and addressing food shortages during the war years. Rationing of meat, butter, eggs, sugar and other products meant a greater reliance on vegetables and grains to sustain the population. Efforts to keep spirits high with civic beautification projects would have also been a challenge given limited funding from memberships and reduced numbers of OHS volunteers for these projects.

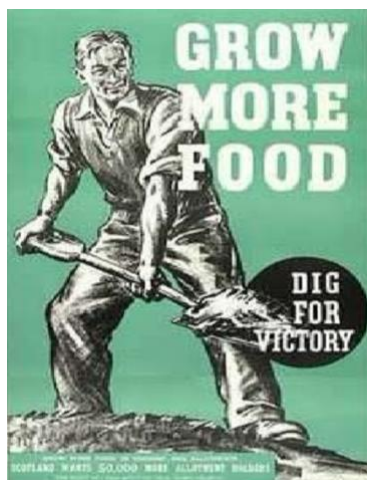


Executive Committee minutes from that decade also echoed challenges around recruiting and retaining Directors for the OHS Board and leadership for the Society. It should be noted that women were taking a much more prominent role in local public affairs and that the OHS saw its first female President, Ethel Guy, in 1945.

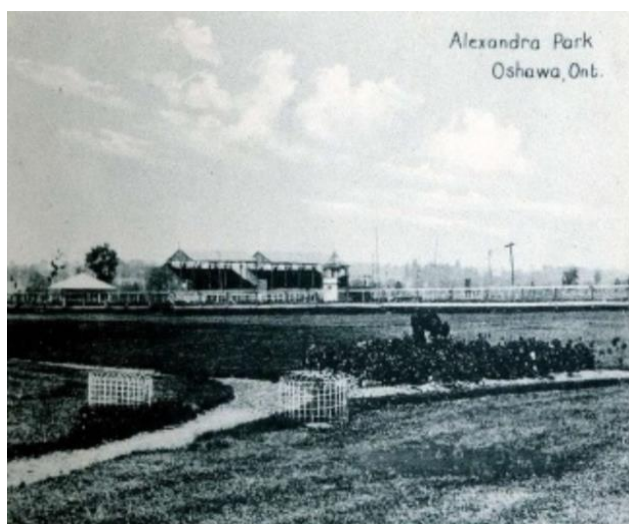
Food Insecurity Continues

In 2010, a local Oshawa group that involved our own Robert Bell with Glenn McKnight, began a project in North Oshawa to commemorate the Victory Gardens of WW2. I highly recommend a visit to their website at <https://oshawavictorygarden.wordpress.com> for the full details. Below are a few illustrations from their site that give the flavour of those important initiatives at that time. No doubt, the OHS would have been involved in helping local residents to develop and sustain home and community gardens to support the war effort and food rationing, given its importance at that time.

While Oshawa was better off than many other parts of Canada, it was recognized that many were struggling with keeping their families fed as jobs were scarce and times were tough. The Oshawa Welfare Society establish garden plots to be used by the unemployed to plant and cultivate vegetable crops to help feed their families. Verna Conant recommended that the OHS provide an award for the best kept garden as an added incentive, however the OHS was not in a position financially to do so but did provide moral support to the initiative.

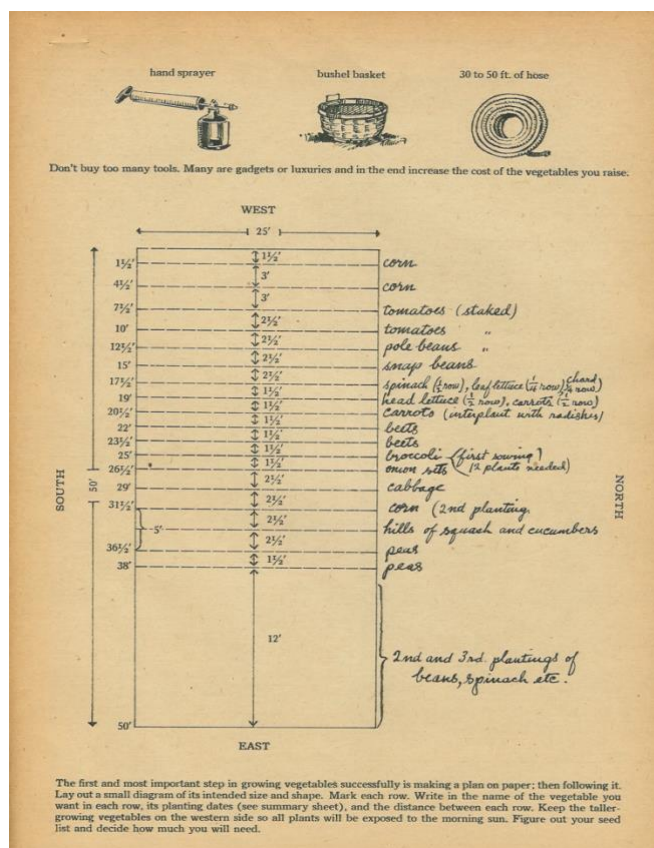


Victory Gardens were established on a community basis as well as individual efforts using guidelines provided by the OHA and other government organizations. As we do now during COVID, many floral beds and park areas were converted to growing food to sustain local families.

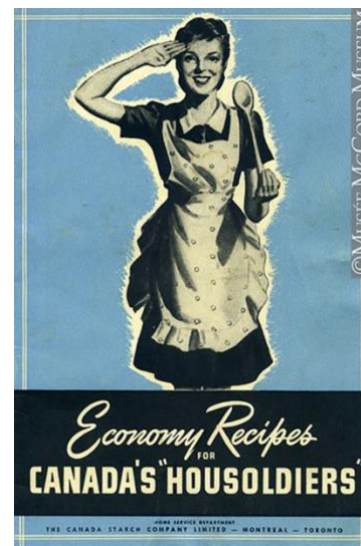
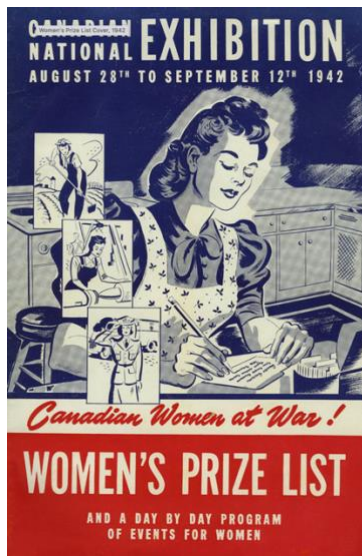


Fairgrounds were converted to veggie plots in our own Alexandra Park.

Guidelines were available to support the development of vegetable gardens at private homes.



Oshawa Horticultural Society



Ads and Posters reflected the (slowly) changing role of women in Canadian Society and featured Civilian "Uniforms" for the War Effort

Even young people were expected to take up "arms", assume roles and support our soldiers and civilians involved in the war effort.

A CHALLENGE TO SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

OUR country today faces the most serious, most fully organized challenge to the cause of Liberty that the world has ever witnessed. The issue is:—

"Shall Government of the People, by the People, for the People Perish from the Earth?"

Your older brothers by tens of thousands have responded to the challenge and have enlisted and are overseas under arms defending our liberty or training to take their place in the first line of defence and attack. Many more are working night and day in the second line producing the munitions of war without which our armies would be helpless. Others are busy making machines and erecting buildings by means of which these munitions may be produced.

A third and equally important line of defence, sadly depleted of man power which it has cheerfully supplied to the first two lines, lies in the production of raw materials and food without which, in increasing quantities, our cause may be lost.

This challenge is a call to you to take your place in this line of defence and man it so effectively that Great Britain and her Allies—fighting for life, liberty and freedom, ours as much as theirs, need never fear a shortage of food.

That this will be a task calling for every ounce of strength, skill and energy you have is certain. We ask you then to give yourself, to the best of your ability through study and physical training and practice of the skills needed on the farm, to the task of making yourself efficient in farm work.

Shortly after Easter you will be asked to take your place on some Ontario farm to help prepare the land, sow, plant, cultivate and finally harvest the crops that will sustain our war efforts late in 1941 and throughout 1942. We recognize that for the great majority of you this work will be a new experience. You may be in a new environment, a strange home, among strange people and customs, called on to do strange work under unusual and trying conditions. Tens of thousands of boys, girls and young people of your age are doing similar work in Great Britain, doing their "bit" to help destroy Hitlerism. We are sure you will worthily render a good account of yourself.



A ration of two pounds per person per week became effective in May, 1942

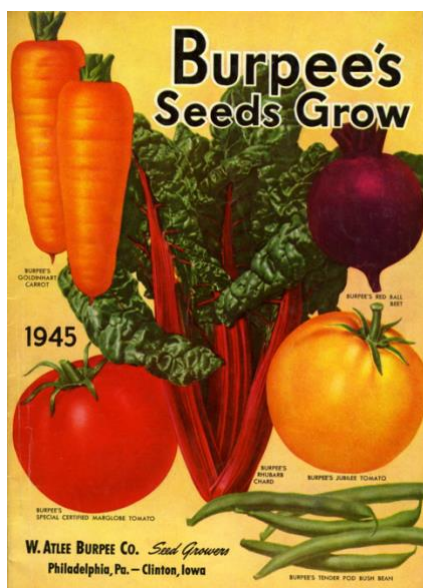
Or

1 1/2 oz of meat per meal

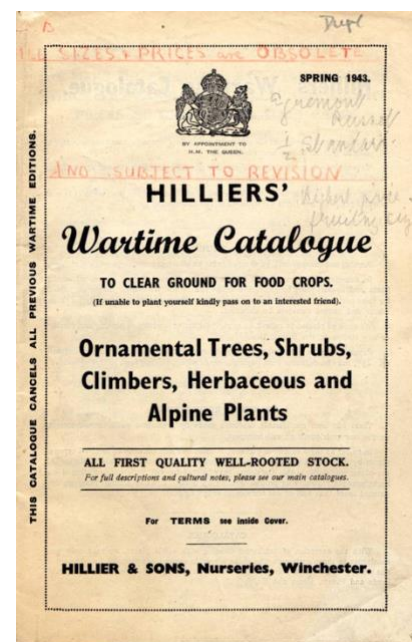


Myself in front of my Dad's shop on Simcoe Street south, circa 1947, in my patriotic "uniform".

Typical Seed Catalogues of the Day



Catalogues of the day reflected a shift from flowers to vegetables.



Flower Shows and Judging.

Trends began to change during the War Years. The OHS still offered competitive prizes for floral displays for local businesses, including Service Stations. However, few stations continued to jump at the opportunity to compete, but a few still did. The focus began to change to OHS competitions and Flower Shows focused on their members but still open to the general public for viewing. Even then, participation waned, and some categories were dropped due to no or only single entries.



A local Supertest station, William and Simcoe, still displays floral window boxes to keep up spirits.

RMG Bouckley Collection



Oshawa Horticultural Society

NEWS OF THE DAY

Local Organizations Join Forces

The Oshawa Horticultural Society has joined forces with the Gladioli Society and the Rose Society to hold joint meetings of their members

Civic Beautification Oshawa Library

With grants from the City of Oshawa, the Oshawa Horticultural Society is now including the Oshawa Library Building on Center Street in



Property purchased in 1906 from Dr. Coburn. The Carnegie fund contributed \$12,000 for a new library completed in 1909. Building was used until McLaughlin library opened December 1st, 1954. This building was sold to CIBC, and a bank was erected. At one time, cannons were situated on either side of the front entrance.



Royal Botanical Gardens

Memorial Park Garden of the Unforgotten

The Oshawa Horticultural Society continues to plant and maintain these gardens to honour our fallen soldiers as part of their Civic Beautification Initiatives.

A Civic Bandshell was recently added to the park from a donation from RS McLaughlin with the OHS

General Meetings

featured speaker who shared travel slideshows and timely advice on roses, gladioli, dahlias, chrysanthemums and of course vegetables and herbs to meet

Preserving Our Heritage

Pioneer Cemetery

For many years now, the Oshawa Horticultural Society has involved volunteers from their membership to tend to the grounds and graves in the oldest Methodist Cemetery in Oshawa where many of our significant



found on headstones

June 1943 ... a Milestone



Typical Wartime Driveway, Nov. 1943

From GMC Employee War Album

Trees from the School Board

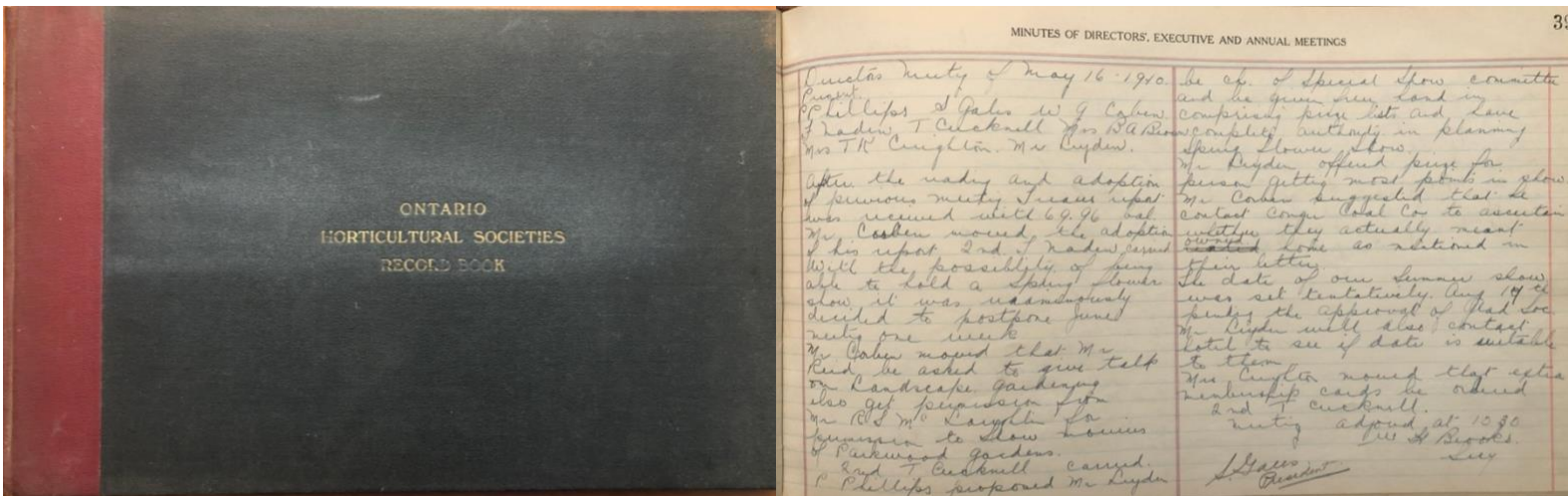
The Oshawa Horticultural Society has been given trees being removed from School Board properties to be used as part of their efforts to preserve and add to the tree cover in Oshawa. The OHS has undertaken several projects with the City of Oshawa to beautify

History of this Cemetery

This [link](#) will take you to a research paper by M. Cole, (not me but my Daughter-in-law, Melissa Cole, Curator at the Oshawa Museum). It outlines the involvement of the OHS in this project. More will be shared in my next chapter when the OHS helps with the gates shown in the picture above.

Nov. 1942

Oshawa residents have been asked to restrict telephone use to urgent and emergency calls only to keep lines open for official



In the 1940s, minutes continued to be kept in ledgers purchased from the OHA. They were completed in handwritten script and followed a standard format that was followed by the secretary. Minutes and reports and show that there were, on average, 9 membership meetings per year with none over the summer months, and 10 to 11 executive meetings.

Most Membership Meetings were held in the auditorium of Centre Street school and most Executive Meetings were held in member homes. Usually, the February Membership Meeting was a social evening with card and other games, music, singing and local entertainment.

OHS Presidents in the 40s

- | | |
|-------|----------------|
| 40-41 | Stanley Gales |
| 42-43 | Dick Branton |
| 44-45 | Fred Kirby |
| 46-47 | Ethel Guy |
| 48 | Theo Carson |
| | /Harold Hainer |
| 49 | Fred Kirby |

A hand-written annual report was clipped into the ledgers as part of the annual AGM in November. At that time the new Board roster was established, and new members brought in.

Annual dues continued to be \$1.00 per year and the OHA annual operating grant rose to \$50 per year. The OHS was part of District 5 that was centred on Toronto and 33 other societies. Minutes show that other local societies, such as Newcastle, Bowmanville, Whitby and Pickering, often extended invitations to the other clubs to visit for a meeting on a rotational basis.

In addition to their floral shows and competitions, the OHS submitted a group entry in the Oshawa Fair at Alexandra Park and often won for their entry. May 1945 – The City of Oshawa was asked to install a metal plaque on the oak tree that was moved from the PUC property to Memorial Park. The tree had grown from an acorn that was acquired from the Windsor Great Park, London, in 1937 and planted in front of the PUC Building on Simcoe Street South.

Next Edition: The Oshawa Horticultural Society 50s-Style

Join me as we continue to explore the very interesting history of our club over the past 9 decades. Please feel free to share your feedback and family history as it relates to our story through info@OshawaGardenClub.com

Number 3 in a series produced by Past President,
Merle Cole, from the OGC Archives.
A project for our 90th Anniversary leading to our
100th Anniversary in 2031